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Near East and South Asia Review

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Supplement
25 March 1988

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Articles

Iranian Air Defenses: Improving on the Margins

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The Iranians recently have improved their air defenses but cannot perform the basic air defense missions consistently. Iran's air defenses can deter the current Iraqi threat, but they would be inadequate against a skilled opponent.

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Afghanistan: Air Defense Without the Soviets

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Assuming the Communist regime in Afghanistan survives a complete Soviet withdrawal, its air defenses will probably be adequate to defend against the minimal air threat posed by Pakistan and Iran. The Afghans can detect and defend against the occasional overflights that have occurred during the past eight years.

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Syria's Military Presence in Libya

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The number of Syrian military personnel serving in Libya grew over the past year. Libya's use of Syrian forces, which began in 1979, provides Tripoli with needed manpower and gives Damascus financial benefits.

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Some articles in Near East and South Asia Review are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the view of a single analyst; an item like this will be designated as a noncoordinated view.

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**Near East and
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Articles

**Iranian Air Defenses:
Improving on the
Margins**



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Iran recently has improved some aspects of its air defenses but still cannot adequately defend its airspace against a skilled opponent. In our judgment, Iran cannot consistently perform the four basic air defense missions—detection, identification, engagement, and destruction of attacking aircraft. Fortunately for Tehran, it faces Iraq—an inept opponent whose attacks on Iranian installations have been only marginally effective. Iranian air defenses are sufficient to provide some deterrence against the Iraqi threat but would be hard pressed to defend against US air forces or an improved Iraqi Air Force.



Radar coverage of Iranian airspace is limited by a lack of spare parts and adequate maintenance.



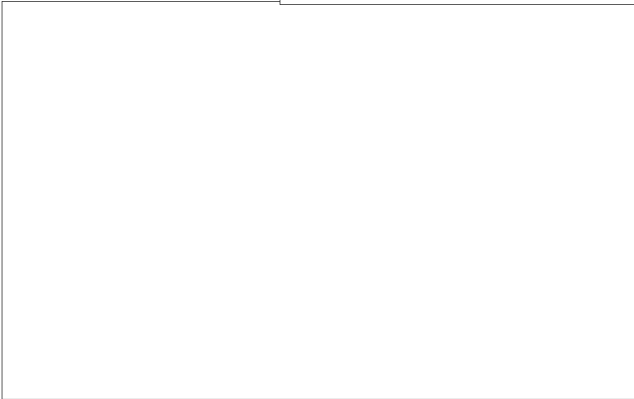
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The Iranian Air Defense Network

Since the fall of the Shah, the effectiveness of the once impressive Iranian air defense system has been greatly reduced. The air defense command's ability to detect, identify, engage, and destroy intruding aircraft is severely limited.



Iran's early warning and ground-controlled intercept network is composed of British- and US-made radars purchased before 1979.



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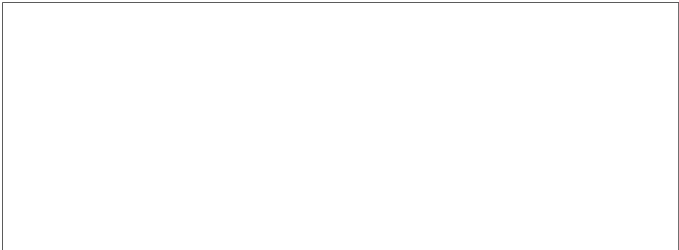


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In the last 18 months, the Iranian Air Force has increased its inventory from about 55 combat-capable fighter aircraft to about 75 and has concomitantly increased its defensive fighter patrols. Iran has accomplished this through an aggressive campaign to acquire spare parts on the international arms market and a modest improvement in its own maintenance and repair capabilities. This force is still too small to defend all of Iran's airspace, and the lack of functioning air-to-air weapons degrades combat effectiveness.



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[REDACTED]

Until the recent downings of enemy aircraft, Iran had not succeeded in an aerial engagement since early 1987 during the Iranian offensives at Basrah, when five and possibly as many as 12 Iraqi aircraft were shot down in dogfights. Usually, Iranian pilots do not engage Iraqi aircraft, in part, because it is often difficult for them to close on an Iraqi target for the desired "sure" kill and, in part, because of the cautiousness of Iraqi pilots, who avoid dogfights.

[REDACTED]

Iranian pilots' inability to engage intruders reflects, in part, Iran's failure to develop a well-coordinated modern air defense command and control network. The present network embodies 20-year-old technology. Air defense headquarters in Tehran receives information from the three outlying air defense sectors via radio or telephone communications, not through direct, machine-to-machine links. This system is slow and provides an incomplete picture of the air defense situation to the central and sector headquarters.

[REDACTED]

The system is plagued with additional command and control problems. Zones are established for interceptors to operate freely under ground-controlled guidance, but fighters have often strayed into sectors where surface-to-air missile and antiaircraft artillery units do not identify their targets and operate with orders to shoot at anything in the air. Several Iranian aircraft have been damaged or lost to ground fire from Iranian elements over the past 18 months.

[REDACTED]

Outlook

Tehran is gradually improving its air defense capability and is concentrating on the two areas that will have the most immediate impact—the acquisition of fighter aircraft and additional surface-to-air missiles. Both would make it more difficult for Iraq to carry out its air war.

[REDACTED]

The acquisition of Chinese-made F-7/F-7M fighter aircraft, an improved version of the Soviet MIG-21, would give Iran an interceptor that would be an effective dogfighter against the Iraqis, despite its old design and short range. The Iranians would need time, however, before they could integrate the F-7/F-7M into their air force and deploy them in sufficient numbers to be effective in an air defense role. Nevertheless, the F-7/F-7M fighters and their new air-to-air missiles would give Tehran a potent interceptor with more dependable weapons than those currently in use.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**Afghanistan: Air Defense Without
the Soviets**

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Assuming the Communist regime in Afghanistan survives a complete Soviet withdrawal, its air defenses will probably be adequate to defend against the minimal air threat posed by Pakistan and Iran. We doubt the Afghans could defend against a determined air attack from either country. Because Iran is tied down in the war with Iraq and Pakistan has assumed a primarily defensive posture along the Afghan border, Afghan air defenses face no serious challenge for the foreseeable future. The Afghans, in our view, can detect and, if necessary, defend against the occasional border overflights—usually involving no more than several high-flying aircraft—that have occurred over the past eight years. Nevertheless, a massed attack of low-flying aircraft would probably overwhelm Afghan defenses and reach their intended targets.

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Organization and Equipment

The responsibility for Afghanistan's air defense is dispersed among various Afghan military components whose combined efforts are supposed to provide a mutually supporting air defense network.

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The Air and Air Defense Forces, commanded directly by the Ministry of Defense, maintain radar posts, strategic missile sites, and fighter units that provide high-altitude, long-range defense against intruding aircraft. Low-level protection of vital military and economic facilities is provided by the Army's antiaircraft artillery battalions.

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The Afghan Army is responsible for low-level defense of fixed positions, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The independent and divisional antiaircraft artillery battalions of the army defend military units, airfields, and strategic facilities such as the Sorubi and Kajaki dams. [REDACTED]

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Threat From Iran

The Afghans probably consider their minimum air defenses positioned against Iran to be adequate because the Iranian Air Force has only a few dozen aircraft flying and these are almost entirely committed to the war with Iraq. Both sides occasionally violate the other's airspace, but these intrusions are often unintentional, in our view. If Iran concluded its war with Iraq and became more involved in Afghanistan, we assess that Tehran retains sufficient airpower—if it is willing to risk losing some aircraft—to strike a severe blow against targets in western Afghanistan after a Soviet withdrawal. [REDACTED]

Meeting the Threat From Pakistan

Although the border with Pakistan is far more volatile than the border with Iran, we believe the Afghans at present consider the air threat from Pakistan to be minimal. Although border violations are frequent—the vast majority are committed by the Afghans—the Pakistanis continue to maintain a primarily defensive posture. Although Pakistan has been vigorous in its efforts at border air defense—maintaining F-16s near Afghanistan on high-alert status and providing border troops with Stinger surface-to-air missiles—Pakistani aircraft are hampered by restrictive rules of engagement and are not allowed to pursue intruders over the Afghan border. [REDACTED]

Shortcomings in Afghan Air Defense

Although the Afghans meet their minimum air defense objective—preventing deep penetrations into Afghan airspace by a few high-flying aircraft—we believe the many shortcomings in their air defense system would render it ineffective in the unlikely event they were subjected to a determined air attack. The most pressing difficulties limiting air defense capabilities are, in our view, the same as those found throughout the Afghan military—manpower shortages, technically unqualified personnel, supply shortages, and factionalism. We believe these shortcomings prevent the Afghan air defense system from absorbing equipment in the necessary quantity and sophistication to build it into a first-rate force. [REDACTED]

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We believe Afghan air defense capabilities have also suffered as a result of insurgent military action. The insurgents have conducted numerous attacks against radar posts, causing long periods of radar downtime,

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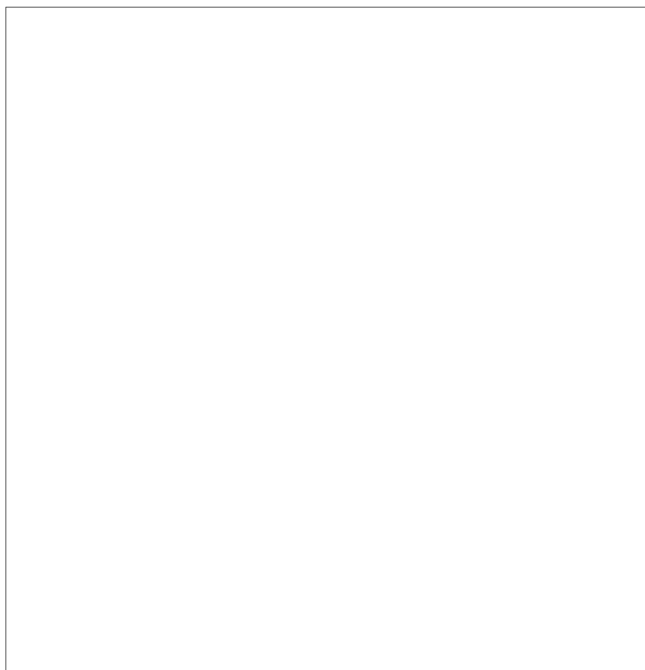
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At the same time, we believe the shortcomings of the air defense system, without the involvement of Soviet forces, could easily be exploited by low-flying aircraft seeking to resupply the insurgents. Aircraft taking advantage of Afghanistan's mountainous landscape, especially along the rugged northeast Pakistani border, that would create difficulties for the most advanced air defense network would have a high probability of evading radar detection by using terrain-masking tactics. Afghan fighter aircraft—having no true lookdown, shootdown capability—would have difficulty acquiring and destroying a low-flying, elusive target. Afghan antiaircraft artillery assets, which protect important military areas, could not prevent resupply flights unless the Afghans were willing to relocate these units to critical, but isolated, border positions near probable air routes.

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After a Soviet Withdrawal

The heavy reliance on Soviet advisers will make it difficult, for the Afghans to operate their air defense system on their own once the Soviets withdraw. The role of the Soviets in directing and controlling the Afghan air defense system is considerable. Soviet advisers probably run all aspects of the air defense network, and the Soviets routinely use Afghan forces to supplement their own air defense network. Nevertheless, after a Soviet withdrawal the Afghans probably will continue to meet their minimum objective—notwithstanding the inefficiency and confusion resulting from the lack of Soviet advisers—assuming that the external air threat remains low.

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Syria's Military Presence
in Libya

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Syria has maintained a military presence in Libya since 1979. This presence has expanded over the past year with the introduction of additional Syrian Army personnel. Tripoli has sought use of Syrian forces—air and ground—because it respects Syria's military capabilities and is constrained its own by manpower shortage. Damascus's primary benefit for supporting Libya is financial, but the arrangement also yields military gains such as combat experience and training. At the same time, the alliance serves the political goals of both states.

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Chad. Syrian pilots may have been involved in Libya's war effort in Chad.

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Damascus has been wary of contributing to Libya's efforts in Chad and may be unaware of the apparent participation of Syrian pilots in the war. A source of the US Embassy in Damascus reported in August 1987 that Syria had denied a Libyan request for combat assistance that included permission to use the "Syrian MIG-23s"—presumably meaning the pilots because there are no Syrian MIG-23 aircraft in Libya.

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Syrian Army Personnel

We believe as many as 500 active duty and retired Syrian Army personnel may be in Libya. Most active duty Syrians serve as trainers and advisers, while the retirees probably joined the Arab mercenary force Libya recruited to support its war in Chad. In the fall of 1987, Libya began recruiting former Syrian Army members and requesting active duty Syrian troops to bolster the deteriorating situation its forces faced in Chad. In September, the US Embassy in Paris reported that Tripoli and Damascus were discussing recruitment by Libya of up to 2,500 ex-Syrian soldiers that were not to be used as combatants in the Chad war.

logical development given the Libyan and Syrian regimes' similar threat perceptions of Egypt and Israel.

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Damascus's Control

Damascus probably exerts no operational control over the day-to-day routine of the Syrians in the Air Force or the Syrians associated with the Libyan Army. We believe all Syrian elements receive their orders directly from their Libyan commands, as if they were Libyan units.

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Syria's Motivations

Damascus's military cooperation with Libya is motivated in large part by its need for hard currency. Individual Syrian military personnel are also motivated by money. Libya,

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pays the Syrian Government generously for each pilot and technician provided. We believe Damascus probably also receives compensation for every Syrian Army officer and specialist sent to Libya as well as for every mercenary recruited. In addition, Libya supplements—in US dollars—the Syrian-paid salaries of high-ranking Syrian Army and Air Force officers, which provides personal incentive for them to serve in Libya.

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The Syrians, especially the pilots, also benefit by fewer constraints on their training activity than they face at home,

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Other Syrian Personnel

President Assad doubtless also uses Syria's military presence in Libya as a symbol of his support for another "revolutionary" and "steadfast" Arab regime. Although Assad probably puts little trust in Qadhafi's promises, he welcomes Libyan support for Syrian hardline policies toward Israel. Given Syria's overall isolation in the region, Libya is one of Assad's few allies.

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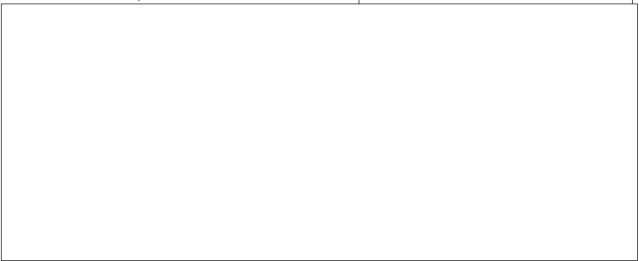
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Qadhafi's Motivations

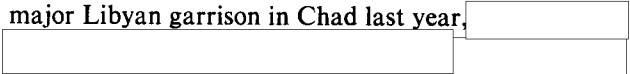
Qadhafi doubtless sees the presence [redacted] in his Air Force as a unique and valuable statement of fraternal support. Many countries provide Libya with military advisers, trainers, and technicians and allow Libya to recruit mercenaries from among their citizenry. Only Damascus, however, allows its servicemen to be seconded to Libya to serve in an operational role.



We believe that Qadhafi's regime often trusts the Syrian [redacted] more than the air units operated by Libyans. The LAAF traditionally has been the most disaffected of the Libyan services, a point reinforced last year by several defections. [redacted]



Tripoli almost certainly seeks Syrian advisory support for its ground forces because it respects Syrian combat experience against Israel. In past conflicts, Syrians have scored tactical victories using weaponry much like that found in the Libyan arsenal. A document outlining tactical considerations in staging an armored assault against prepared defenses, signed by the senior Syrian instructor in Libya, was among the material captured when the Chadians overran a major Libyan garrison in Chad last year, [redacted]



Tripoli probably views the Syrian advisory support as complementary to—but independent of—Soviet advice. The structure and composition of Libyan and Syrian ground units are similar, particularly below the brigade level; both follow the Soviet model. The Libyans almost certainly are interested in the Syrian adaptation of Soviet doctrine to their particular combat operations. They also would value Syrian assessments of the suitability of individual pieces of Soviet-built equipment—especially items that the Soviets encourage the Libyans to buy. [redacted]



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